

A Gospel Address

2 Cor. 4, 5.

G. V. Wigram.

Christian Friend, vol. 8, 1881, p. 197.

I have read these chapters together because they present the gospel in the way in which Paul learnt all the leading points of it. There was a certain man very remarkable for his self-righteousness — Saul of Tarsus. He thought he could put forth his power mightily to vindicate God's cause against One whom he thought an impostor — Jesus of Nazareth; and when he saw the light of the glory shine down on Stephen, it had no effect on him whatever; it only stirred his heart up to go to the high priest to get letters to Damascus. All the hard thoughts he had about Christ had a response in the heart of Christ. He looked down and saw that man with those clothes laid at his feet; and He said, "That is the man I will take up; and I will put him into Stephen's place, whether he likes it or not" The Lord called him as he went down to Damascus "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Saul's answer was, "Who art thou, Lord?" "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." What gentleness of the Lord Jesus! The next word is, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The Lord put that man for the first time into the place of an enquirer about the person of the Lord Jesus. He says, "The first time I ever asked the question, 'Who art thou?' was when I saw the divine glory shining down, and heard the voice of Him who I thought was an impostor calling me by name; what could I do but give up all to Him?" He gives up all his thoughts, and says, "I know Him, and I am at His disposal." Peter, James, and John did not know the Lord Jesus in this way till He was risen from the dead. Both Peter and Paul had to learn what was the main object for which Christ came into the world; and they got the light of it after He rose from the dead. The revelation of Christ as being gone into heaven had to be made known to Peter. Now, how many of you can say, I know Him? Do you know Him? After what sort of fashion? with any sort of intimacy? When I was nineteen, if friends talked to me about Christ, I knew nothing; but when the Lord came and introduced Himself to me I thought that a person was close to me, and that everything I had done was out in the light; but instead of coming to condemn me, there was nothing but love in Him. I could have told you who Jesus Christ was, and who Caesar was; but as to knowing Himself, I was utterly ignorant. But as He made His passages of love into my heart, out came the confession of what I was. I have had forty-seven years' apprenticeship under Christ; and of all the things on which my heart dwells as to eternity, I say, "I have got One who is gone there before me."

God says, "Let there be light." (v. 6.) The One who spoke light out of darkness could speak light into darkness, as He does into the heart of the poor sinner. I want to call attention to what Paul had to learn. Peter learnt it too, that it was not what men did to Christ in crucifying Him that contained the full meaning of His death, but there was a "determinate counsel of God." He let men run their whole course, because He could not be a just God, and the Justifier of him that believeth, without the blood of Christ. They had God in the world, and they would not have Him there, and now the blood is in heaven. They say, We will not have that either. It is the world, not the earth, spoken of here — the world, the system man has set up to make himself happy without God. God comes into the scene, and man says, "I will not have you." "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." He did not come raking up their transgressions. God saw that reconciliation was what was wanted. He saw that unless He could take that enmity out of my heart, we could never come together. And now Paul says, "He has committed unto us the word of this reconciliation." The unconverted say, "I cannot admit that I need reconciling to God, or else I should be lost." "Oh," says

the Christian, "that is just where I get my rest!" Even a child very soon displays will. What does God say? "Very unlike my Son; I cannot get on with it." Does He turn away? No; He says you want reconciling. "You are in a path of 'I will' and 'I won't:' it leads to hell. My Son went through the world, and only said 'I will' twice, and that when it was My will." Does God deal with will in man? Yes; He sent out the apostles and others with this word, "Be ye reconciled to God."

Let me say a word about the need of this reconciliation, because I knew so much about it for nineteen years. When I learnt I was going down a sloping path to hell, I set myself to work out righteousness, and worked myself nearly to death, having no idea of doing things by halves. And what did I see all this come to? God says, "I must do the work." What! that no one but God was to have the credit of salvation? That I was to come as a poor sinner? Why that will let me down so very low! It just proved that I wanted reconciling. I was saying, up to that time, "I don't like Thy way." Perhaps some of you are saying to God, "I don't like Thy way; I must do something." God says, "I *did* it eighteen hundred years ago. My Son died. I shall not do the work again. If you come into My presence, saying, I am going to do everything for myself, I say, I do not know you." Are you going to displace every thing in heaven? Are you going to undo the work of Christ, and bring in a new way? That work has stood before God for more than eighteen hundred years, and are you, an upstart creature, going to say, No; that work must be set aside, and a way must be made for me, to let me figure out and show what I am?

In the last verse we get the basis of it all. If we pause on verse 21, we shall find how different God's thoughts are from man's thoughts. "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Very well put by the apostle in a few words, because we cannot say, Who can this be? for we know there was only One who "knew no sin." It might be placed over the Lord Jesus in heaven, "This Man hath done nothing amiss;" but more than that, "*He knew no sin.*" "Holy, harmless, undefiled," etc. God made Him to be sin; now what does man think about that? I heard it said, "I don't think there is any justice about that;" but man, when he undertakes to judge God, is in the dark. It would never have been just or righteousness if He had been made sin contrary to His will. I just remark, that in all these infidel reasonings men take things for granted that are not true. Had not God a right to do as He liked? Had not He a right to sit in heaven from all eternity? Yes. Had not He a right to leave that place, and take His place on the cross? Man must keep his own place, or else he comes into judgment. Who can say to God, Thou must not be here? All that it brings out is, that when the gospel is presented to man, he says, "I do not like God, or His ways." It shows another thing, that the wisdom of God was such that He knew how to take the absolute ruin of man, and make that the means of the greatest glory to Himself. Look at man in the garden; he turned his back upon God, and followed Satan. How did He remedy it? Could man? No; God says, "I will step in there, and turn that very ruin to My own praise." How did He do it? His Son comes down to drink that cup of wrath for sinners; the Son of God was made sin. He is the only Person yet who has ever tasted the wrath of God against sin, and I am bold to say He was the only One who could taste it fully. Take a man who goes to "his own place:" he knows what it is to be separated from God; but how can a finite being learn what is infinite? But when the Son of God came into the world He took the cup of wrath. Who will measure what He went through? the thought of God hiding His face from Him? Many a believer has tried to measure sin, and he says, "No, I cannot; I find the measure in the cross which I cannot measure." He was forsaken of God; that is the sort of God who sent Peter and Paul with this message to poor sinners. "I have made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for you."

Then you get the other thought brought out in the latter part of the verse, "That we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." God hid His face from His Son, just as the Jews and Gentiles were mocking Him; but He did not mean it to end there. Ire says, "Now come to My right hand, and let Me

show the world what I think of You; and every one who comes to Me in Thy name shall receive a hearty welcome." It is as simple as possible. Suppose I had been into a foreign land, and saved the life of some man out of a river. I return, and I want a favour of some of you who are akin to him; I come to you; you say, "I do not know you." I reply, "Have you heard from your son lately?" You tell me all that has passed, and I say, "I am the man who saved him." "Oh," you say, "what will I not give you! Come and sit down, and make my home your home:" Just so with God and Christ; if you come in your own name He does not know you, if you come in His name you get a hearty welcome. The thing is as clear as possible, and you have firm ground to go upon if you come in His name.

What is the connection between this and human righteousness? Human righteousness is, I do this and that, and when I have done, God forms the judgment of it. God's righteousness is God saying, "I have done something, and I want some one to recognize it, and to come in His name." That is heart-work when we come to know a loving Saviour; faith-work when we come to think of what God has done. Then there is conscience-work; you cannot look into my conscience, or I into yours. We see a beautiful conscience-work in the apostle. He says we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; not the great white throne — that is at the end of the thousand years. Those who appear there will never appear at the other judgment-seat. Here it is like a man who has been away from home; he comes back and settles up his accounts in a loving way: good servants like their masters to keep short reckonings. When Christ gathers all His people together there, it is a question of how He shall place them in the kingdom. If I speak of appearing in a place, I mean I shall be manifest. Paul says, My doctrine is manifest, and we must all be manifested. People do not like that: what, all come out there? I will tell you why they do not like it, they have not been manifested to themselves yet; but you cannot escape it if you mean to be in the glory. But stop; what are you afraid of? Who are you going to meet there? The Lord Jesus Christ. No mistake about His having known you as a sinner, and as a failing saint He does not expect you to be just like Himself. He expects a poor sinner saved by grace Will it be a very painful thing to be there? He will say, as He did to Peter, "I had not a bit of faith in you, but you had a bit of faith in Me, and that is what brought you here." Will it be painful if He says, You owe it all to Me; do not go and say, that you did it yourself. Are you afraid to appear before Him there? What does God think about me? what do saints of God think about me? what do I think about myself? If I have not weighed myself up in God's presence, no wonder I am not at ease at the thought of being at the judgment-seat. Is your thought about yourself anything but the blood of Christ as to acceptance? I would rather come cleansed by that blood than in my own righteousness even if it were possible.

What do I think of all that blessed favour into which I am brought? Christ is gone into heaven, and I am to go in there. It is what I think of Christ, not what I think of myself; it clears out every thought of myself. Where are poor sinners who do not know they want cleansing by blood? Lost! lost! lost! No matter who you are — either a poor sinner with a Saviour, or a poor sinful man cleaving to his sinfulness. Paul says, I do not come to teach you human righteousness, but Jesus Christ who is revealed to you and me. The eye of that Lord looks down on us now. When He was on earth He looked down on a little company like this; He knew Nicodemus at the first glance, and He knew the woman of Samaria at the first glance. As He looks down on us, does He see one who knows His blood, His finished work, or one who cares nothing about Him? I am connected with One who is the centre of all God's purposes; I know that all that is true of a believer, and a great deal more. It is wonderful, God's way of setting aside all that is of the flesh, and making a way that lets naughty sinners down in self-abhorrence, and makes them say, "My trust is in the Lord." Who else should ruined sinners trust in? Everything in connection with sin about me makes me loathe myself, and cling to Him and say, Christ for me. G. V. W.

